

Civic Efficiency and Social Welfare in Planning of Land

by W. F. Burditt

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LAND is the primary source of all production, the foundation of our homes and industry. The conservation and development of our country's resources, the health, prosperity and happiness of our people depend upon the manner in which we plan and utilize the land. And yet the fore-sighted planning of the land, until quite recent years, received but little thought or attention.

With respect to the country as a whole, there has been but little effort to plan with foresight its economic development. Is it not safe to say that, had it been possible to survey and plan with a vision of the future a transportation system for this great Dominion, in advance of its development, it would have been possible to devise a railway service that, with half the expenditure would have been at least equal in efficiency to what we have; or, on the other hand, that with skilled and co-ordinated planning more effective service might have been obtained with the same expenditure? In like manner, no comprehensive scheme has been followed in laying out the highways of the country. An immense saving in the cost of highway maintenance and transportation could be effected were it possible to plan anew the entire highway system of the country.

I wish particularly to refer to the planning of land for urban development—the land that lies within, without, and around our city boundaries—and to the influence that such planning may have upon the efficiency and social well-being of the community.

Proper Planning Essential

Western people will say they have had quite sufficient planning of land to serve for some time; what they now need is something that will enable them to absorb, digest and assimilate the extensive plotted areas which lie around every western town. Of planning of a certain kind I freely admit there has been more than enough. That kind of planning has not been confined to the western provinces. Nearly all this planning, whether of railroads that span the continent, or of city streets in the subdivision of agricultural land, has had individual gain for its main object, while control in the public interest has been almost entirely absent. In the planning of land for urban use, the subdivider is not the only party interested; the prospective occupier and the community should also be considered. The object of

intelligent planning should be to harmonize these three interests, which are not so divergent as might appear.

The subdivider thinks he has a right to do as he likes with his land, so he lays it out in rectangular blocks, parallel to his boundary lines, to secure the greatest number of building lots within a given area; this without any attempt to co-ordinate his particular plan with that of adjoining property or with any other part of the city plan.

Upon this continent the tendency has been to unduly magnify the rights of the individual, especially the rights involved in the individual ownership of land, to the neglect of community rights. As a consequence, the planning of our towns and cities as well as of the country has been left to uncontrolled individual and competitive enterprise.

Land is not the product of human genius or industry; it is the gift of the Creator and the heritage of all people. Every man has a right to sufficient of the earth's surface to enable him to live, so that in Canada, with its 3,729,665 square miles of surface, among eight million people, there should be no crowding. The title to the land was originally vested in the Crown, which signifies that in the first instance it belonged to the people as a whole. The obtaining from the Crown of a title to a few acres, or a few thousand acres, constitutes merely a trust that may at any time be withdrawn if the authority from whom it was originally obtained finds such course expedient. Titles may pass from one to another, the land change its so-called ownership a thousand times, but there is always back of the individual title, what is termed the right of eminent domain, a recognition of the fact that the Crown—the Government representing the people—has always the right to take back any portion of the land, paying the holder merely for his acquired interest therein. It follows, therefore, that where there is this right of eminent domain there must also be the right to control, in the interest of the community, the use to which land shall be put and the manner of using it.

The city is the home of the community, and should be planned as we plan our homes, for the benefit of all its occupants and with every possible provision for their health and happiness. When a man wishes to build a house he obtains the best mechanical skill he can procure and plans his house so that it will be well adapted to its site, convenient and commodious, with ample space and abundant light. He will give due consideration to sanitation, economy of service and maintenance, and to everything that will tend to provide him with a home as comfortable, convenient, healthful and attractive as his means will afford.

The City is the Home

The city is not only the home and dwelling place of the community, but it is also the work-shop; hence it needs to be planned as we plan our modern factories, with every possible facility for commercial traffic. The city may be well

planned, badly planned, or not planned at all, but, as in the case of the individual dwelling or factory, its convenience and attractiveness, its healthfulness, the economy of its service and its efficiency for business, its effectiveness for all the functions that a modern city is called upon to fulfil, will depend upon the skill and foresight exercised in the preparation of a well-conceived and comprehensive plan, which makes, so far as practicable, provision for the future needs of the community. It should, however, be planned as a whole, functioning the different parts to the needs of the whole community; one part should be for work and service, another for rest and still another for recreation. It follows that the effective planning of a city involves the proper choice of sites for the different parts; industrial establishments should be located on land best suited to industrial purposes, while the residential portion, the rest-room of the city, should be protected from the noisy intrusion of the work-shop.

Expert advice should be secured

When we plan our houses and our factories we pay anywhere from three to ten per cent of the prospective cost for expert advice. The best expert advice obtainable in town planning would probably not cost one-tenth of one per cent of the expenditure involved, yet so little have we as communities appreciated the importance of comprehensive and foresighted planning for a city's development, that only in rare instances has such advice been sought.

Not infrequently, a factory grows, as most of our cities have done, by external accretions, added from time to time as the need for expansion arises, until ultimately the whole aggregation becomes so inconvenient and ineffective in meeting modern requirements, so costly in operation, that it pays to tear it all down and build anew. Many a city finds itself in the same plight as the obsolete factory, excessively burdened with overhead charges because of lack of foresight in its planning. You cannot, however, tear down and rebuild the ill-planned city as you would the old factory. On rare occasions, as the result of some calamity, the opportunity comes to a city to rebuild upon better lines, as in San Francisco in 1906, but advantage has seldom been taken of even such opportunities.

Expense of Delayed Action

Almost every large city and town in England has spent vast sums of money in the last twenty-five years in removing and improving congested districts, and in assimilating independently planned districts in the surrounding suburbs. For the most part, the cost of improving congested districts has been met by the increased rental value of the improved area, but the expense of providing or connecting and assimilating independent drainage systems, avenues of traffic, and the like, in the newly built accretions around most of the large cities has involved the loss of an immense amount of capital, that might have been avoided by comprehensive planning under control

of the municipal authorities. It has been estimated that not less than \$30,000,000 has been lost to the ratepayers of Great Britain in the last thirty years for lack of the town-planning powers which they now possess under the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909.

Many of the larger cities on this continent have in recent years expended large sums in correcting the errors of bad planning. Philadelphia, for instance, is spending millions in cutting diagonal streets through its rectangular blocks and many other cities are only deterred from similar undertakings by the immense cost involved. Toronto, though comparatively young, is contemplating extensive and costly improvements of a similar character for the purpose of relieving congestion caused by its gridiron plan. One of the most difficult and costly of our present-day civic problems is the provision for traffic, not merely or chiefly the conveyance of merchandise, but the conveyance to and from of the vast number of people who find employment in the business and manufacturing centres of our large cities; but in the planning of our cities it has received but little consideration. Streets have been laid out as though it were anticipated that the traffic would be evenly distributed throughout the city's area, yet experience and statistics indicate that three-quarters of a city's traffic radiates from the centre outward. This means that there should be a sufficient number of arterial thoroughfares radiating outward from the centres of trade and commerce, which, in their aggregate capacity, will have to take care of seventy-five per cent of the city's traffic. We say 'time is money,' while every year we are wasting a large percentage of our time and productive energy in travelling around these rectangular blocks; for the distance is forty per cent greater than by a direct diagonal course. A further and equally serious objection to the gridiron plan is that it is impossible to determine in advance which of these parallel streets will become traffic streets, be devoted to business or remain residential. In other words, the plan affords no means of differentiation as to the character of the street. While a few may prove to be too narrow, ninety per cent are made wider than necessary, entailing enormous waste in the cost of construction and maintenance. In truth, this plotting of streets in parallel lines crossing each other at right angles is done without any reference whatever to facilities for traffic, easy gradients, drainage, economy in construction and maintenance or any other consideration, except that of securing the largest number of building lots out of a given area of land.

Advantages of Diagonal Streets

In the west, where townsites are generally on level areas, considerations of topography and grades do not enter so largely into the planning problem as they do in the Eastern provinces, but, even where the site is comparatively level, there are many cogent reasons other than those I have mentioned for departure from the gridiron plan. One is that such a plan affords little

opportunity for architectural effect; unless a building occupies the whole side of a block only two sides at most may be exposed to view. On the other hand, either a radial or diagonal street plan will afford numerous opportunities at the junction of converging streets where a three-front site will be available, and further, it is possible to so arrange streets, meeting at different angles, that a building occupying such a position becomes the central feature in the vista of one or more of the streets converging at that point.

Not less important than an effective street plan is the provision of open spaces—playgrounds and small parks at frequent intervals, with larger parks wherever suitable and easily accessible land is available. We have not, in Canada, appreciated as we should, the value of our waterfronts. No doubt we will more highly appreciate these and similar things when we become a little less absorbed in acquiring wealth and begin to think a little more of the amenities of city life and the elevating influence of natural scenery coupled with artistic effect. Reservation of land for parks and parkways, whether on the water-front or elsewhere, can usually be made at small cost to the community if made at the right time, with provision for appropriating the resulting increase in value of adjoining property.

Influence of City Planning on Character

The character of the plan has a very great influence upon the character of the people who become occupants of the land and indirectly upon the social status and well-being of the whole community. We have only within the past few years awakened to the fact that we have in many of our cities, areas in which, though limited in extent, the congestion is as great and the conditions generally almost as bad as in the slum districts of the older cities of the United States and Europe. We have been hearing a good deal about the housing problem and its consequences; but what are its causes? Principally, need and greed—the need of people to live or find shelter in some place not too far removed from their work, and the greed which prompts men to take advantage of this fact. These men, having acquired possession of a small portion of the earth's surface, tax their fellow citizens all they can stand for the privilege of living upon it. In time, the need or the greed prompts the tenant to subdivide his apartment or to take in lodgers, and thus room over-crowding follows upon land over-crowding.

In olden times, cities became congested because of being ringed about with stone walls. In these days they are encompassed by a ring of land speculators and circumscribed by the limit of the five-cent fare. The housing problem is, therefore, in part a transportation problem, and the problem of transportation facilities enters largely into the planning of land. Prevention is better than cure, and in planning for the future growth of our cities, coupled with proper restriction and control, we can

if we will, prevent land over-crowding, which is the primary cause of all the ills associated with bad housing.

The custom in this country of subdividing land into 25 x 100 foot lots, with a rear alley running between two tiers of lots, invites congestion, and, coupled with the inflated prices at which lots are sold, has a direct tendency to over-crowding. It not only encourages, but almost forces, the building of houses in solid rows. The provision of the rear alley is in itself a recognition of the fact that sooner or later the entire width of every lot will be built upon at the street end, so that access to the rear can only be had by the rear alley. But the rear of the lots, being thus accessible by a sort of semi-public thoroughfare, it is not long before someone conceives the idea of turning the rear portion of his lot to account by putting up another and usually much inferior building there; and then another and another follows his example until a double row of shacks or cheap inferior houses fronting upon a narrow street or alley 15 to 20 feet wide, for the care and up-keep of which the city acknowledges no responsibility. A slum is created and the entire block is depreciated in value. Housing reformers in Washington and other cities of the United States have found it necessary to buy up large blocks of property for the purpose of ridding the city of slums created in just the way I have described.

It is sometimes argued that the crowding of land is necessary in the interest of the wage earner who cannot afford to pay the high rents that are supposed to result from a more liberal use of land. High priced land, we must admit, results in crowding, but the converse is equally true, for the more people you crowd upon a given area of land, the higher the price which must be paid for its use. There is no greater fallacy than that which supposes that rents are permanently, even if temporarily, reduced by crowding.

The character of occupancy is influenced by the planning of land, but planning, however good, is of little value without effective control. Many of the more enlightened real estate dealers have recognized the value of restriction both to themselves and their clients. In the absence of any civic or municipal control, they establish by agreement with their customers, restrictions as to the number of houses that may be erected on a given area, the character and even the cost of the houses that may be erected and how far they shall be set back from the street. They prohibit the erection of certain kinds of buildings and endeavour to exclude from the limited area which they control every feature that may be regarded as objectionable in a residential district. The advantages are mutual, to the subdivider a better price for his land, to the purchaser stability of value, and to the occupier and limited community in which he dwells, amenity and pleasant surroundings. There is some question as to how far restrictions thus created as a condition of sale, can be enforced against subsequent purchasers, and it is consequently doubtful

whether they can be permanently effective. Moreover, restrictions thus imposed by private agreement have only a very limited effect so far as the general welfare of the community is concerned. They usually apply only to what is termed high-class residential property. The areas that are subdivided to provide building sites for the great mass of the people are subject to no reservation or restriction other than the occasional stipulation of a building line. The men of small income, the wage-earners and workers of the community, who are in a great majority, have as much right to light, air and breathing space, to pleasant and healthful surroundings, and protection from undesirable intrusion as their more fortunate fellow citizens.

It is not unusual to see land plotted for residential purposes that is much better adapted for industrial or other use, or to see a useful but offensive industry established in the midst of what would otherwise be a desirable residential district. Thus, the mere making of plans is not sufficient. Along with far-sighted and comprehensive planning of land for the future expansion of our cities there should be vested in the municipality power to so far control the use of land as to make its plans operative and effective in accomplishing their purpose for the benefit of the whole community.

Before closing, I would like to make a brief reference to what we are doing along this line in my own province. The Legislature of New Brunswick, in 1912, at the instance of the Town Planning Committee of the St. John Board of Trade, passed a Town Planning Act, the provisions of which were based upon the English Act of 1909. It is permissive in its character but can be brought into operation, subject to certain conditions, on the initiative of any city or municipal council. St. John has taken power under this Act for the preparation of a town-planning scheme, covering an area of approximately five miles radius from the present city's centre. Part of the area is within the city limits, but by far the greater part is in the outlying parishes, which are controlled by a separate authority. One of the most important advantages conferred by the Act is that it makes it possible for the controlling authority, in co-operation with other local authorities, to make plans for expansion beyond its present boundaries and co-ordinate all the diverse and independent planning of different interests in one comprehensive scheme. St. John claims the credit of making the first move in Canada for town-planning legislation and to have been the first to commence the preparation of a town-planning scheme. We have not, so far, made very rapid progress with the preparation of our St. John scheme, but, with the assistance of Mr. Thomas Adams, Town Planning Adviser to the Commission of Conservation, who has done so much to arouse the people of Canada to a sense of the importance of this subject and to an interest in municipal affairs and civic improvement of every kind, we hope to make more

rapid progress in the future. We are already deeply indebted to Mr. Adams and the Commission of Conservation for the very valuable assistance they have rendered during the past year or more.

The preparation of a town-planning scheme involves a great deal more than the making of a map or plan. The plan is in fact only the visual expression and illustration of the scheme. The scheme itself is concerned with the laying out of streets; it locates and reserves land for main thoroughfares, for parks, playgrounds and open spaces, and determines what shall be done and what shall not be done with relation to the occupation of land for building purposes, prescribes the width between building lines, limits the height of buildings, the number of houses per acre in specified districts, and indicates how the cost of street construction and drainage shall be provided. It embodies in effect a set of by-laws under which the future development of the city is to be controlled by the municipal authority. When completed and approved the scheme has all the authority of a special act of Parliament. The objects I have spoken of cannot, of course, be accomplished without some interference with what are termed individual rights and the rights of property, but the rights of the community are ever paramount to those of the individual.

For a quarter of a century or so preceding the outbreak of the war, so rapid was the development of Canada, so great were the opportunities for gain, that as individuals we became almost wholly absorbed in the acquisition of wealth and, as communities, in the increase of population and the expansion of our commerce and industry; while the amenities of life, the health and happiness of the masses, received scant consideration. The war, with the enormous sacrifices it has entailed for the purpose of upholding the ideals of free citizenship, has thrown into new perspective our relationship to our fellow men, and all the obligations and responsibilities which such relationship entails. We begin to realize that the accumulation of wealth is not the highest object in life, that the possession of wealth is itself insecure and of little advantage while city slums are breeding places of pestilence, and the masses of the people, the real wealth producers, are unhappy, discontented and largely incapacitated for work by the sunless and insanitary conditions under which they eke out a precarious existence. Let us hope that our men of thought and action will take a greater interest, not only in the planning of land, but in all that has for its object the social well-being of the community.

Planning and Development of Land

BY

THOMAS ADAMS

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Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen: It is recognized that land in Canada—the greatest of all our natural resources—has not been planned and developed in the best way to promote its economic use, and with the primary aim of stimulating production. The orgy of speculation has passed and we see the extent of the injury it has caused to production and the physical and moral injury it has caused to our people. Our resources in these western provinces have no end that can be visualized if we could conceive them to be properly organized; but as at present organized their end appears to be fast approaching.

The absence of a sound system of development for the economic use of land and all natural resources, and of human resource and energy as a raw material of wealth, has brought us face to face with acute financial and social problems which will not be solved in this generation unless we show ourselves more awake to the significance of present tendencies and conditions.

We cannot separate town and country, or province and municipality, or manufacturing and agriculture. Their interdependence must be recognized. We must establish confidence in government organization under our federal system unless we desire to revert to autocracy; we must impose more confidence on the base of government organization, which rests in the municipality.

To promote industry in town and country we must recognize that production alone makes or increases wealth, and that speculation diminishes production, and therefore diminishes wealth. Urgent as are our urban problems, our chief attention needs to be directed to our rural problems. In connection with the rural problems we need

1. To plan and develop land for economic use
2. To promote closer settlement and closer connection between manufacture and agriculture
3. To provide facilities for co-operation, rural credit, education and social intercourse.

**Agriculture Must
be Made to Pay**

There is no simple solution of these problems; planning and development will only provide the foundation on which to build. We must plan to promote values and methods of production as well as to guide physical development.